Red

There is a wall. On this wall is a story. No, more than one.

The first is a summer day and agitation spells the air, alighting each molecule with ewers of red. The wall is blank, almost ignoble in its emptiness. The pavement is black.

Red, blank, black. Red. Blank. Black. Red. Blank. Black. Red. Blame. Black. Red. Blame. Back. Red. He said. Red. Red.

A breeze, maybe. Perhaps a semblance of memory. A needle prick of a story.

It has something to do with scars. Scars and chalk. She stands at the wall, water in hand and feet tucked in like a taproot. She leans against it. She takes out a piece of yellow chalk from her pocket, weighing it in her palm. Twenty paces down, a mother is carrying her child. A leap left is a couple, sharing whispers. Indiscriminate things. Two trees away shows a man getting his wallet stolen. She focuses on that. Not that specifically, but rather the fallow-faced thief. The amber of his hair. The flavous of his teeth. It’s too gaunt a yellow for the chalk, but it’ll do. She presses the chalk to the blank wall and scribbles into it like an imprecation. A breeze, maybe, and he’s there. Tapping his foot, impatience printed like a novel all around his mouth.

*You can’t be doing that.*

*Why not?*

*You just can’t.*

*Who are you?*

*Someone who doesn’t like things being drawn on when they’re not supposed to be.*

*It’s a wall. It’s blank.*

*Doesn’t mean you have to fill it up.*

A glare. A flick of the wrist. There’s a bright, golden sun, suddenly, on the wall. The middle isn’t filled in. The middle says: Ass.

*Funny.*

*I know.*

An act of vengeance and the water that was in her hand is now melting the sun, running down the wall like a scar.

*That’s funnier.*

*Ass.*

*Don’t draw on stuff that isn’t yours.*

The second is a massacre in fall. It’s a massacre because dead twigs and faded leaves spread like bodies on the pavement. Red, orange, yellow, brown. Against black. The wall is mostly clean, save for a wretched smudge of color in the upper left corner. This has something to do with second chances. And third chances, because the second ones are usually just as messed up as the first ones. She stands at the wall, tissue in hand and feet caved in like an apology. She unravels a photograph from her fingers, testing its durability. Then she rips it. Tears it into chunks, and then smaller chunks, more and more until they settle like perpetual dust in her lungs. A shuffle of feet, a cloud of white breath curling in the sky, and he’s there.

*I thought we went over this before.*

*What would you do for a second chance?*

*Me?*

*Yes, you ass, i.e., the only other human being in the park.*

*I wouldn’t do anything. I don’t need second chances.*

*Never?*

*Never. I do things right the first time, or I forget and move on.*

*Convenient. Can I hug you?*

*What? No, what the hell is wr––*

A sob. A stiff pat on the back. Screw propriety. The bodies on the pavement shift in their combustion chambers and prepare for self-destruction. They only blend in more with the black. On the wall, colors bloom and acquiesce.

The third is an evening in winter. People change and segregate. It has something to do with the weather, with how snowflakes make everything else seem like it’s breaking down. But this time, it has nothing to do with weather. Or snowflakes. It doesn’t have to do with anything at all. She crouches at the wall, spray paint and gloves in hand. She spews the black mist from the bottle in rapture, watches it crawl and consume and conquer, a paragon of strength. Of control. She was never a pious individual, but she thinks she could pledge herself to this. A shout, a wheezing intake of disbelief, and he’s there.

*Are you a fucking maniac?*

*Stop yelling and join me. It’s fun.*

*You call destroying public property fun?*

*You could call it anything, really. You could call anything anything.*

*How about I call you a disrespectful fiend?*

*Now you’re being rude.*

*You’re being ridiculous.*

*At least I’m having a good time with it.*

*Sure, just like how you had a really good time throwing yourself at me.*

*Jesus, you* are *an ass. I hugged you because I was sad, not a coquette. Move on. I thought you were good with things like that.*

*That’s only for second chances.*

*Last time I checked, this is already our third time meeting.*

*Hand me that can.*

A fizzle. A spark. A hiss.

*I thought you said not to draw on stuff that isn’t yours.*

*Shut up.*

The fourth is a spring morning and the daisies someone has taped to the wall make the black a little more bearable. It has something to do with color balance, how the light balances the dark, or maybe that’s feng shui. Either way, she’s standing at the wall again. She’s holding roses. She’s smiling, rubbing something between her fingers. It leaves a trace of red. A bump, a surprised look, and he’s there.

*Oh, hello again.*

*These are for you.*

*Me?*

*Yes, you ass.*

A smile. A frown. A flick of the wrist, and there’s a bouquet of roses, suddenly, pushed back. A frown.

*I’m engaged.*

*Since when?*

*Since three weeks ago.*

*You didn’t tell me.*

*Look, I don’t even know you. We talked a few times and that was it.*

*You said not to draw on stuff that isn’t yours. You drew all over me. I wasn’t yours, but you still drew all over me. I wasn’t a blank wall. I didn’t need filling. And now I’m overflowing.*

The flowers are red. His face is blank. She’s wearing black.

*What the hell are you talking about?*

*I love you.*

*You’re crazy.*

*Stop denying what we have.*

*We have nothing!*

*You love me.*

*As I said, you’re crazy.*

*Please. Don’t make me do this.*

The wall is black. It’s blank. It’s about a thief. It’s about a wallet. It’s about a man who got his wallet stolen. It’s about scars. It’s about bodies. It’s about paint cans. It’s about control.

It’s red.

*Do what?*

She pulls out the knife and drives it into his neck.

Red, red, red everywhere.